

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, November 22, 1876, with transcript

Letter from Miss Mabel Hubbard to Mr. Alexander Graham Bell. PALACE HOTEL San Francisco. November 22, 1876. My dear Alec:

I am very tired tonight so don't expect a nice letter. Today like all the other San Francisco days has been perfect, soft and balmy. We have been trudging around all day with the exception of a visit to a Joss House, trying to find presents. We found it fearful work, there was little choice among the Japanese goods, some very pretty things but hardly what we wanted and entirely out of our reach. A small Japanese vase for instance cost \$55. We bought a pair of blankets for Mamma also lovely quilted dressing gowns for her and others, Sister has got several trays and one or two wall pictures. I have some tiny Japanese pictures and blue silk handkerchiefs for Grace and that is all. I begin to sympathise with you in your search for a present, I haven't the least idea what to get for you my dear and you don't catch me coming back empty handed if I can help it. About two we interrupted our shopping to go in our official character to the very store where we had spent the day. The shop people were so amused and grinned from ear to ear across their broad pleasant faces. Then we went to the Joss House. It was a church festival and a great crowd of long-tailed blue-shirted chinamen, with here and there a pretty smooth headed China woman, stood waiting outside and all through the queer building. They made way at once for us and we entered an oblong entrance hall, the walls covered with red paper, inscribed with the queer chinese characters, like wall paper. Two or three diminutive gaudy idols were arranged along the sides, a whole family of still smaller ones standing on — I have been interrupted several times and fear I can't tell you all I wanted to. We passed from the entrance hall into another guarded by a fearful fellow ten feet high, while remarkable houses stand along one side. On a raised platform 2 on the further end musicians were scraping and beating away on ancient instruments which looked as if they had been stolen

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from Pompeii. Into a small room pervaded with sweet incense we next went and were introduced to the pleased and smiling priests ranged on Chinese chairs along the walls while another Chinaman passed around a box of cigars. Of course I took one which I am saving up for you. Then the priest poured out wine and passed it around and we sat there for a while the Chinese explaining the mysteries as well as they were able in their broken English. Then upstairs to a room full of sweet incense and gay with the most brilliant colors, scarlet, blue, gold, cloth of gold and scarlet hung around high alters containing tall chandeliers and beautiful high vases with exquisite Chinese artificial flowers. Overhead hung beautiful big glass lanterns, boards with mystic letters painted blue and scarlet against gold ground were arranged one above the other on the walls. At the further end in a little alcove formed of gorgeous gilded open iron work sat the image of the great Joss, a little brown cross legged man with long mustache ends reaching to waist. In front on the alter were arranged his food — prettily arranged lumps of rice and strange looking compounds, votive offerings, - the whole room being the strangest mixtures of brilliant colors, strange devices and exquisite workmanship we ever saw. Downstairs is another room the walls hung with paper pictures representing the fate of the bad such as would have delighted the soul of Michael Angelo, whose great work on purgatory they much resembled. The people were just as kind and pleasant as could be and apparently taking our visit as a great honor, every single Chinese official or spectator did all in their power to make our visit pleasant.

This evening we saw some screen pictures of Arctic exploration. I was so tired I hardly knew what was going on. I am going to bed now. 3 We get up early tomorrow, leaving at eight by special steamboat and car for a days trip, I know not whether I shall miss tomorrow's mail which, I much regret as no letter has come tonight, being delayed.

With very much love, in haste, Ever your, Mabel.